

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5260

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 9, 2009

Title: An act relating to motivating students through incentives to pursue postsecondary education by eliminating the use of statewide assessments as a high school graduation requirement.

Brief Description: Motivating students through incentives to pursue postsecondary education by eliminating statewide assessments as a high school graduation requirement.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Fraser, Pridemore, Hargrove, Sheldon, Kauffman, Hobbs, Hatfield, Fairley and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/04/09, 2/09/09 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5260 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair, Early Learning; Oemig, Vice Chair, K-12; Brandland, Hobbs and Holmquist.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators King, Ranking Minority Member; Jarrett, McDermott, Roach and Tom.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: As of 2007-08, 23 states, including Washington, require students to pass some form of exit exam for high school graduation purposes. The types of tests and the required subjects vary.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The SPI, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges must jointly review incentive programs in other states that are intended to increase the number of students meeting state standards and/or motivate students to pursue postsecondary education. A joint report to the Legislature is due by December 1, 2009, including recommendations for

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incentive programs to spend savings realized by eliminating the statewide assessment for graduation and consideration of creating a public-private partnership to implement the recommendations.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): The high school graduation requirement to obtain a CAA or CIA by meeting the state standard on the high school WASL and all the related statutes that were repealed in the original bill are now retained. A study of incentive programs remains.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: This bill supports high standards but removes the requirement to pass a high stakes test in order to graduate from high school. We need to remove the barriers to student success. This bill will identify incentives for students to meet standards instead of using the current punitive and stressful approach of labeling students as failures and denying them a high school diploma when they do not pass one high stakes test. Such harsh requirements are likely to exasperate rather than close the achievement gap. Exit exams have not demonstrated that they motivate students or improve student achievement. Some students are not good paper and pencil test takers but are bright and capable of being successful. Accountability is not found in a test score. Instead of focusing on an assessment, we should focus on curriculum improvement to avoid dysfunctional side effects. We should trust the professionals in the classroom, celebrate the learning of students, and not focus on their deficits. Please add an emergency clause so students in the graduating class of 2009 do not need to suffer taking the WASL to graduate. Clearly the EALRs are culturally biased, which makes the assessment used to assess the EALRS also culturally biased. Therefore, the requirement to pass the assessment to graduate from high school needs to be eliminated because it is unfair to our students of color. For our students to be successful it is important to have language and culture included so that they can fully understand. The tribes are using their own funds to provide additional help to our kids to pass the WASL but we still have too many who will not pass.

CON: We need to maintain high standards and have the measurement of those standards coupled with graduation because we must be able to ascertain that students have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful after high school. Too many of our students must pay for remediation at the college level. Our educational system has failed those students.

OTHER: The ethnic commissions should be allowed to appoint members to the study group that will look at incentives.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Wendy Rader-Konafalski, Washington Education Association; David Johnston, Capital High School Teacher; John Harlor, Reading Specialist; Cathy DeJong, Parent; Suzi Wright, Valda Gobin, Tulalip Tribe; Juanita Doyon, Parent Empowerment Network; Christy Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

CON: Allan Burke, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Brian Jefferies, Washington Roundtable; Lisa Macfarlane, League of Education Voters; Edie Harding, State Board of Education; and Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.

OTHER: Ben Kodama, Equitable Opportunity Caucus.